

Utilitarian and Hedonic Consumption Values on American College Students' Athletic Footwear Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

The influence of two primary consumption value (utilitarian and hedonic) factors was investigated on the college students' intention to purchase athletic footwear. Three hundred twenty (N = 320) college students participated in the study. Three utilitarian value factors (comfort, durability, and price) and three hedonic value factors (style, color, and celebrity endorsement) have emerged through literature review and a factor analysis. The results indicated that utilitarian value factors play a more significant role than hedonic values when college students purchase athletic footwear. A series of ANOVA indicated that the influence of consumption value factors did not significantly differ on students' demographic backgrounds of genders and races. Marketers and advertising managers of athletic footwear companies should utilize the findings of this study to communicate with college student consumers more effectively.

Key words: Utilitarian and Hedonic Values, College Students, Purchase Intention

INTRODUCTION

To be a successful company, companies are required to develop effective marketing strategies. There is no doubt that one of the most fundamental factors that companies should pay attention when developing marketing strategies is understanding consumers' purchasing behaviors.

Consumer purchasing behavior is a complex matter as many internal and external factors have an impact on consumers' buying decisions. However, one principle that never changes has been that consumers purchase products to acquire certain benefits by exchanging their valuable resources such as time, money, efforts, etc. Hence, it is crucial for marketers to know what values drive consumers to make purchases.

During the past two decades, hedonic and utilitarian values on consumers purchasing behavior have drawn significant attention by both practitioners and academicians across disciplines because research has consistently supported that consumer purchases are mostly driven by utilitarian and/or hedonic values (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Crowley, Spangenberg and Hughes, 1992; Chitturi, Raghunathan and Mahajan, 2007; Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; Kivetz and Simonson 2002; Okada, 2005; Voss, Spangenberg and Grohmann, 2003).

In order to advance knowledge in consumer behavior, researchers have studied consumer behavior in a variety of consumer segments. Among the consumer segments, due to the buying power and unique characteristics, the college student market is considered as one of the most lucrative markets (Noble, Haytko and Phillips, 2009; Bahng, Kincade and Yang, 2013). Refuel Agency (2015) reported that college students in the US spent more than \$545 billion annually. These college students consume a wide variety of product categories, and athletic footwear was one of the most popular shopping items for college students (Morrison, 2004).

Despite college students are considered as an important consumer group, much is unknown about these individuals' consumption behaviors because many companies either simply overlook or do not know how to connect with the market (Noble et al. 2009). Most research on young consumers focuses on either the entire generation or the demographic and attitudinal characteristics of the market rather than consumption behaviors or college students (Noble et al. 2009). Similarly, Bahng et al. (2013) also emphasized the lack of research endeavor on the college student market that "this group of young adult consumers has often neglected in market studies, viewed "en mass," or as "one style fits all" college students" (p. 368).

Moreover, to our best knowledge, no studies have been conducted on the influence of consumption values on college students' sport product purchase intentions. In order to address this vacancy, this study was specifically designed to investigate the influence of two dominant consumption values (utilitarian and hedonic) on college students' athletic footwear purchase intentions. This study further examined the relationship between the influence of consumption values and the demographic backgrounds of participants. Developing such knowledge can make contributions to the literature in the field of consumer behavior and lead marketing professionals to develop more effective marketing strategies.

In the following section, the theoretical background of two dominant consumption values (utilitarian and hedonic) and the college student market will be provided.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Hedonic and Utilitarian Consumption Values

The influence of personal values on human behavior has long been a topic of interest for social scientists in various fields. Rokeach (1973), a well-known social psychologist, claimed that

virtually, all social phenomena are the consequences of human values, and, thus, values are the fundamental factors to understand human behaviors. Rokeach (1973) defined a value as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence” (p. 5). Further, a value has “a transcendental quality to it, guiding actions, attitudes, judgments, and comparisons across specific objects and situations and beyond the immediate goals to more ultimate goals” (p. 18). From the definition above, a value can be described as a belief that is a product of human experience through interactions with various social constituencies. Naturally, people pursue values by being engaged in or promoting certain behaviors (Bardi and Schwartz, 2003). As a result, these values guide the selection or evaluation of individual actions to achieve desirable goals (Bardi and Schwartz, 2003).

Scholars in a variety of fields have consistently investigated the correlation between human values and their behaviors. For example, values have been proven to influence salesperson's performance, satisfaction, and propensity to quit (Apasu-Gbotsu, 1982), college students' class enrollment decision making (Feather, 1988), political choices (Schwartz, 1997), intercollegiate athletics goals and processes (Trail and Chelladurai, 2002), engagement in corporate social responsibility (Hemingway and Maclagan 2004), and unethical practices and work behavior among managers of manufacturing organizations (Suar and Kuntia, 2010).

The role of personal values has also received much attention from practitioners and researchers in consumer behavior during the past several decades. Clawson and Vinson (1978) stressed the role of personal values in consumer behavior that “values may prove to be one of the more powerful explanations of, and influences on, consumer behavior. They can perhaps equal or surpass the contributions of other major constructs, including attitudes, product attributes, degree of deliberation, product classifications, and lifestyles” (p. 400). Researchers consistently found that individual values have been found to influence a variety of aspects of consumers' behavior, such as brand switching behavior (Chiu, Hsieh, Li, and Lee, 2005), brand preference, satisfaction, and loyalty (Cronin, Brady, and Hult, 2000), apparel product involvement (Kim, 2005), food choice (Honkanen, Verplanken, and Olsen, 2006), socially conscious and frugal behaviors (Pepper, Jackson, and Uzzell, 2009), green purchases (Kim and Choi, 2005; Pinto, Nique, Añaña, and Herter, 2011), the Internet shopping motivations (To, Liao, and Lin, 2007; O'Brien, 2010; Sakar, 2012), and organic personal care product purchases (Kim and Chung, 2011).

Although a number of recent researchers argue that the value is more complex and multidimensional, the two dominant values that have received much attention from both practitioners and academics in consumer behavior studies were utilitarian and hedonic consumption values (Batra and Ahtola, 1990; Crowley et al. 1992; Chitturi et al. 2007; Dhar and Wertebroch, 2000; Kivetz and Simonson 2002; Okada 2005; Voss et al. 2003). Childers, Carr, Peck, and Carson (2001) asserted that “Clearly, many values exist as shopping goals, but most typologies consider instrumental (utilitarian) and hedonic values as fundamental to understanding consumer shopping behavior because they maintain a basic underlying presence across consumption phenomena” (p. 513).

Until the early 1970s, consumer studies limited the consumer value to the utilitarian point of view because, in a traditional view, consumers buy products due to purely necessity (Bloch and Bruce, 1984; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). However, researchers in 1980s extended their views on consumer shopping values that consumers are not only driven by functional needs but also by emotional needs (Babin, Darden, and Griffin, 1994). Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) posited that consumers are either “problem solvers” or “fun seekers.” In other words, consumer shopping behavior can be viewed as an inclusive process stimulated by thoughts and senses that provide individuals with cognitive (utilitarian) and affective (hedonic) values. Hence, the fundamental difference between the two values is that utilitarian consumption values are more cognitively-driven, such as functional, instructional, practical, and task-oriented (Batra and Ahtola, 1990, Childers et al. 2001), whereas hedonic values are more emotionally-driven, such as experiential, pleasure, multisensory, and entertainment-oriented (Overby and Lee, 2006; Nili, Delavari, Tavassoli and Barati, 2013). From the utilitarian perspective, shopping is described as work, meaning that consumers focus on purchasing products in an efficient and effortless manner to achieve objectives (Griffin, Babin, and Modianos, 2000; Fischer and Arnold, 1990; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy, 1993). Whereas, shopping is described as an adventure for enjoyment and entertainment from the hedonic viewpoint (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982).

College Student Market

Unlike college students in previous generations, today’s college students are financially empowered because 75% of college students are holding part-time or full-time jobs which commanding nearly \$13,000 of annual per capita (The 360 Youth College Explorer Study, 2009). This market consumes a wider range of necessities as well as elective purchases of goods and services than any other consumer group. For example, the college market spends well over \$ 50 billion on food, \$18.6 billion on clothing and shoes, \$14 billion on telecommunications, \$9.8 billion on entertainment, and another \$9.8 billion on personal care products (Refuel Agency, 2015). The college students are considered as the most affluent consumers not only for the current market but also for the future market (Morrison, 2004; Schiffman and Kanuk, 1991).

College students also exert great influence on the purchase decisions of their families and peers because they are characterized as fashion trendsetters and early adopters of new products (Morrison, 2004; Wong and Smith, 2002). According to Alloy Marketing and Media Report (2008), sixty-eight percent of female students and fifty percent male students generally turn to their peers for advice when purchase products such as movies, electronics, and other personal items.

Another important fact that makes the college student market such an attractive market is that college years are time to establish and develop loyalty toward certain brands (DeBard, 2004; Refuel Agency, 2015). Young people, college students in particular, are willing to try new products and forming the brand loyalties which will carry them for years to come or, often, throughout their lives and establish brand loyalties, which makes them irresistible as marketing targets. DeBard (2004) also acknowledged that young adults (college students) are committed to a brand as long as it provides for their needs. Obviously, marketers want to make

a favorable and early impression on a prospect with the potential of using their services or product for the next 50 years. Therefore, many Fortune 500 companies have specific divisions to target solely to the college student market and spend significant amount money to reach this lucrative market (Morrison, 2004).

Despite, as stated previously, the college student market is a very lucrative market for businesses, the majority of authors studying college market focuses more on the demographic and attitudinal characteristics of this market rather than their consumption behaviors (Noble et al. 2009). In the area of sport business, a few studies have been conducted to examine college students' purchasing behavior, however, there is a dearth of research endeavors on the influence of the two distinctive consumption (utilitarian and hedonic) values on college students' athletic footwear purchase intentions.

METHODS

Participants

Participants for this study were 320 college students from a university in the Midwest part of the United States. Of the 320 participants, females represented 50.6% ($n = 162$) and males made up 49.4% ($n = 158$) of the participants. In terms of the grade level, 26.3% ($n = 84$) were freshmen, 23.4% ($n = 75$) sophomores, 13.4% ($n = 43$) juniors, 15.6% ($n = 50$) seniors, and 21.3% ($n = 68$) were graduate students. Regarding the race of participants, 42.5% ($n = 136$) were Caucasians, 24.3% ($n = 78$) African-Americans, 16.3% ($n = 52$) Latinos, 14.7% ($n = 47$) Asians, and 2.2% ($n = 7$) students were other races than above. The Table 1 represents the profile of the participants.

Table 1
Profile of Study Subjects

	N	%
Gender		
Male	158	49.4
Female	162	50.6
Grade Level (Year in College)		
Freshmen	84	26.3
Sophomore	75	23.4
Junior	43	13.4
Senior	50	15.6
Graduate	68	21.3
Race		
Caucasian	136	42.5
African-American	78	24.3
Latino	52	16.3
Asian	47	14.7
Others	7	2.2
Total	320	100.0

Instrumentation

The instrument developed for this study was a survey questionnaire. The initial survey questionnaire was developed and purified based on literature review and feedback from 3 experts. In addition, the survey instrument was modified upon the results of the pilot test and the factor analysis. The final survey for this study consisted of two parts with 26 questions. The first part of the survey consisted of demographic questions. The second part of the survey contained questions about the influence of the two consumption values on the college students' purchase intentions for athletic footwear. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used to measure the degree of influence of each factor on purchase intentions. Through the factor analysis, three utilitarian (durability, comfort, and price) and three hedonic values (style, color, and celebrity endorsement) have emerged. The purchase intention was measured with 3 items with a 5-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree) as well. The reliability of Cronbach's α is .88 for the purchase intention. The results of a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of model statistics revealed that the chi-square for the model is not significant ($p > .05$), and the goodness-of-fit index was satisfactory (CFI= .95, NFI= .93, and RMSEA = .051). With regard to the reliability and validity of the instrument, as reported in Table 2, the CFA results support the reliability and convergent validity for all measures. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the six constructs ranged from .74 (color) and

.91 (comfort), which exceeded the .7 threshold (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) of the constructs exceeds .5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In terms of the convergent validity, all estimated loadings of indicators for the underlying constructs are significant (the smallest t-value = 5.24, $p < .05$). Specifically, all Lambda score of factor loadings of each item exceeded .5. The six factors explained 71.58% of the variance in purchase intentions.

Table 2
Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	Construct Reliability	Average Extracted	Variance	Item Loadings
Durability	.822	.624		
I like my athletic footwear to last as long as possible				.76
The durability of athletic footwear is very important when purchasing athletic shoes				.78
Comfort	.911	.691		
I like purchasing athletic footwear that can give me maximum comfort				.88
The comfort is very important when purchasing athletic footwear				.86
Price	.851	.662		
I buy athletic footwear on a specific budget				.88
I am very price conscious when I am purchasing athletic footwear				.80
I usually do not buy athletic footwear out of a certain price range				.83
Style	.782	.618		
When purchasing athletic footwear, the style is very important to me				.80
I like to buy athletic footwear that are considered as a popular style at the time of purchase				.84
Color	.713	.597		
I usually purchase certain color athletic shoes				.73
I like my athletic shoes to look good when people see me wearing them				.78
The color of athletic shoes is very important when purchasing				.76
Endorsement	.740	.612		
I usually buy shoes made by a specific company				.83
I have loyalty toward specific brand of shoes				.66
The athletics shoes worn by athletes play into my decision when purchasing				.70
It is important know who endorses the athletic shoes when purchasing.				.73
Purchase Intention	.88	.682		
I would likely buy a pair of athletic shoes in the near future				.92
The next time I purchase athletic shoes, I will choose ones that meet my criteria				.88
I would likely buy athletic shoes of certain brand because it has external attributes that I like				.85

Notes: All items were measured using five-point scales anchored by 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”.

RESULTS

The result of descriptive statistics found that over 85% of the participants stated that they will buy at least a pair of athletic footwear within the next 12 months. In addition, the result revealed that college students were very conscious about their athletic footwear purchases. Specifically, the mean scores for questions “Deciding which athletic footwear to buy would be an important decision to me” and “When purchasing athletic footwear, I choose ones that meet my criteria” were 4.6 and 4.4 respectively. Hence, as expected, it was confirmed that the consumption values will play a significant role when college students make athletic footwear purchases. The results of path analyses of SEM, using the six factors as predict variables and the purchase intentions as a criterion variable, found that the R^2 of the overall model was 0.546 and F test statistics were significant ($F = 6.272$, $p < .001$). Among the six factors, three utilitarian factors, comfort ($\beta = .191$) durability ($\beta = .172$), and price ($\beta = .14$), and one hedonic factor, style ($\beta = .138$), found to significantly influence the purchase intention.

ANOVA between the two consumption values revealed that, overall, the utilitarian values ($M = 4.20$) played a more important role than the hedonic values ($M = 3.18$) ($F = 9.320$, $p < .001$) on college students’ athletic footwear purchase intention. Specifically, the mean scores on the purchase intention for all utilitarian factors, comfort ($M = 4.54$), durability ($M = 4.51$), and price ($M = 3.75$), were higher than the mean scores of hedonic values of style ($M = 3.74$), color ($M = 3.66$), and celebrity endorsement ($M = 2.21$). In terms of relationships between gender and the consumption values on the purchase intention, the influence of six factors did not statistically differ between genders (see Table 3). Both male and female students stated that comfort was the most important factor when they make a purchase decision, followed by durability. The third most influential factor for male students is price, while style is for female students. Celebrity endorsement is least influential factor for both male and female students’ purchase intention of athletic footwear.

Table 3.
Means and Standard Deviations of the Influence of Consumption Values between Genders

Attributes	Males		Females	
	Means	SDs	Means	SDs
Utilitarian values	4.57	0.58	4.28	0.80
Comfort	4.63	0.53	4.39	0.78
Durability	4.51	0.63	4.16	0.89
Price	3.78	0.94	3.69	0.87
Hedonic values	3.63	0.81	3.76	0.82
Style	3.72	0.76	3.75	0.82
Color	3.55	0.87	3.77	0.82
Endorsement	2.28	0.97	2.14	1.05

In terms of the relationship between the consumption values and races, the influence of the two primary consumption values on the purchase intention did not statistically differ among races. As presented in the Table 4, the utilitarian values are more influential than the hedonic values. However, when look at each value more carefully, the order of each of 6 factors is different among races. Specifically, comfort and durability were found to be the two most influential values for all races except African-American students. For African-American students, interestingly, style, one of the hedonic values, is the second most influential value, followed by durability and color. Furthermore, unlike other races, color is more important value than price for African-American students.

Table 4.
Means and Standard Deviations of the Influence of Consumption Values on Race

Factors	Caucasians		African-Americans		Latinos		Asians		Others	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Comfort	4.68	.47	4.52	.53	4.17	1.05	4.46	.68	4.07	.53
Durability	4.52	.64	4.14	1.05	4.36	.72	4.11	.69	4.28	.56
Price	3.70	.98	3.58	.91	4.13	.76	3.73	.69	3.76	.99
Style	3.65	.68	4.12	.75	3.33	.93	3.77	.73	3.71	.70
Color	3.62	.87	3.77	.72	3.63	.75	3.45	.88	3.71	.56
Endorsement	2.02	.89	2.25	1.13	2.00	1.20	2.91	.98	2.42	.60

DISCUSSION

As Noble et al. (2009) noted, the majority of research on college-aged market provides either a demographic or attitudinal characteristics of the market rather than their consumption behaviors. This study attempted to provide such a research need by investigating the influence of two primary consumption values on college student consumers' athletic footwear purchase intentions.

The result of this study suggested that utilitarian value factors (comfort, durability, and price) play a more important role than hedonic value factors (style, color, and celebrity endorsement) on college students' athletic footwear purchase intentions. Specifically, this research confirmed the findings of previous studies that perceived quality and functionality of a product encourage consumers to choose a certain brand over competing brands because the perception of high quality and functionality may lead consumers to recognize the differentiation and the superiority of a particular brand (Babin et al. 2004; Yoo, Donthu, and Lee, 2000). Simply put, if other aspects of any two products are being equal, the perceived quality and functionality of the product are two overriding factors that influence consumers' purchase intention. Moreover, athletic footwear is thought to be as utilitarian or functional products for many college students, thus, it is not surprising to see that college student consumers seek athletic footwear with quality and functionality. As compared with hedonic products, which are typically are judged by the amount of pleasure they provide, utilitarian products are judged by the degree of functionality. This statement is also supported by the finding of this study that the price of the product is another important factor that influence college students' athletic footwear purchase intentions. In general, when purchasing utilitarian products, consumers are more sensitive about the price of the products, while consumers are more flexible on spending for hedonic products. In other words, consumers' willingness-to-pay (WTP) is higher for hedonic products than for utilitarian products.

With regard to the relationship between gender and the influence of consumption values, overall, the influence of consumption values did not significantly differ between genders. Two utilitarian values, comfort and durability, are the two most influential values for both genders when purchasing athletic footwear. However, the third most influential value for male students is price, while style is for female students. Interestingly, two hedonic, style and color, were more important factors than price for female students when purchasing athletic footwear. Girls and women are often encouraged to be more concerned about and interested in their appearance and beauty than price in comparison of boys and men (Chang, Burns, and Francis, 2004). Such concerns and interests for appearance and beauty lead to a variety of attitudes and behaviors of shopping. Although the gender-neutrality has become current trends in many industries, athletic footwear is conspicuously consumed products that may represent consumers.

For the relationship between the consumption values and races, although, in general, the utilitarian values are more influential than the hedonic values, when look at each value more carefully, the order of each of 6 value factors is different among races. Specifically, comfort and durability were found to be the two most influential values for all races except African-American students. For African-American students, interestingly, style, one of the

hedonic values, is the second most influential value, followed by durability. In addition, unlike other races, color is more important value than price for African-American students. This finding indicates that, as compared to other races, hedonic values play as important role as utilitarian values for African-American students when purchasing athletics footwear.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research can provide some important insights for practitioners in the athletic footwear industry to understand the consumption behavior of the college student market. First, athletic footwear companies should emphasize the utilitarian aspects of their products. For example, when athletic footwear companies advertise their products in mass media, they have to show that their products are durable and comfort. Furthermore, it is recommended for athletic footwear companies that they should not ignore the hedonic elements (color and style) of their products for female college student consumers. Finally, it is also recommended that when targeting African-American college students, athletic footwear companies should be focusing on utilitarian elements as well as hedonic values of style.

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